



# Committing to Student Engagement

*Reflections on CCSSE's First Five Years*

**2007 Findings**

# Acknowledgments

As CCSSE celebrates its fifth year of serving community colleges, a special message of gratitude goes to these people:

... to **George Kuh**, director of the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE), who will retire from that role in 2008, we happily acknowledge that we could not have done what we've done without your support, expertise, and generous collegueship.

... to **Peter Ewell**, vice president of the National Center for Higher Education Management Systems (NCHEMS) and chair for these five years — and forever, we hope! — of CCSSE's National Advisory Board, who is amazingly knowledgeable, helpfully wise, and incessantly willing to work.

... to **John Roueche**, director of the Community College Leadership Program at The University of Texas at Austin, who sees possibilities and helps in countless ways to make them real.

... to the **CCSSE staff**, a remarkable collection of talented, diverse, dedicated, and genuinely nice people — what a gift!

... and finally, to **the presidents, faculty, and staff of the 548 community colleges participating in CCSSE**, we especially celebrate your commitment to ensuring educational opportunity and quality for millions of students. We are privileged to be a part of that work.

Kay McClenney, *Director*

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## Foreword

# CCSSE: Where the Action Is

Community colleges are in the spotlight. When the history of American higher education is updated years from now, the story of our current times will highlight the pivotal role community colleges played in developing human capital and bolstering the nation's educational system.

Upwards of four-fifths of American adults need some form of postsecondary education to live economically independent, civically responsible lives. And community colleges are the launching pad for half of all students in postsecondary education.

Community colleges enroll disproportionate numbers of students from low-income and other historically underserved backgrounds — many of whom are underprepared for college-level work. Of course, institutions cannot change the challenges students bring with them when they start college. But with the right assessment tools, colleges can identify ways to strengthen practice so they can increase the chances that their students will attain their educational and personal goals. To monitor progress and improve student achievement, community colleges — like their four-year counterparts — need good data.



For the past five years, the Community College Survey of Student Engagement (CCSSE) has been at the cutting edge of measuring aspects of the student experience that are linked to student success. The validation studies summarized in this report show the link between CCSSE results and improved student success. CCSSE's reach and influence — it has collected information from almost 700,000 students at 548 different colleges in 48 states, British Columbia, and the Marshall Islands — is nothing short of remarkable in such a short period of time.

Equally impressive are CCSSE's groundbreaking efforts to promote institutional transparency.

CCSSE was the first national higher education initiative to take the bold step of publicly reporting

information that matters in student learning — so that interested parties can learn from what participating institutions discover about student engagement and related aspects of their performance. And so, from the first round of reporting, CCSSE began to experiment responsibly with making institutional results available in terms of five benchmarks of effective educational practice. Now, just five years later, there is widespread agreement and encouragement from such groups as the National Commission on the Future of Higher Education, the American Association of State Colleges and Universities, and the National Association of State Universities and Land Grant Colleges that public reporting is long overdue.

CCSSE is the exemplar to be emulated, as demonstrated by the CCSSE Web site, which facilitates multiple ways to access, analyze, and benchmark institution-level survey results.

Finally, CCSSE is a major source of benchmarking and performance data for the most ambitious, comprehensive improvement effort in the history of American higher education: the national Achieving the Dream initiative. In addition to providing immediately useful data to participating colleges, combining CCSSE results with Achieving the Dream data will create a treasure trove of information for scholars and policymakers to examine for years to come.

Yes, community colleges are in the spotlight and CCSSE is near the center of that beam. It is the right work for the times and, as this and previous reports indicate, CCSSE results are providing rich, meaningful insights into the differentiated patterns of engagement of various community college student groups. We all should be impressed with what CCSSE has done in such a short time. And we all should take great pleasure in applauding what CCSSE has accomplished, primarily because its good work directly benefits students and the institutions wise enough to use its services.

## Happy Fifth Birthday, CCSSE!

**George D. Kuh**

*Director, National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE)*

*Chancellor's Professor and Director, Indiana University Center for Postsecondary Research*

# What We've Learned about Student Engagement

The Community College Survey of Student Engagement (CCSSE) this year celebrates five years of helping community colleges better serve their students. With its unrelenting focus on using data to improve students' educational experiences, CCSSE has established itself as a leading voice in community college improvement efforts. More important, CCSSE has helped a growing number of college leaders change the way they think about their work. College faculty and administrators who once made decisions based on their personal perceptions now increasingly base decisions — about everything from allocating resources to selecting teaching strategies — on evidence.

And perhaps most significant, over the past half decade, CCSSE and its member colleges have learned a great deal about how to engage students so they will be more likely to attain their academic goals.

This report highlights the results of CCSSE's annual survey of community college students. In honor of its fifth anniversary, CCSSE this year presents these results in terms of lessons learned and strategies that work.

There is no silver bullet that will help more community college students succeed. There is, however, a growing body of data and research that can help colleges improve their educational practices

and chart a course that will lead to better results. CCSSE is proud of its contributions to this critical effort.

In its first five years, CCSSE has:

- ★ **Created the CCSSE survey and the CCSSE benchmarks,** which give participating colleges objective and relevant data about their students' experiences. With these data, the colleges can better understand how effectively they are engaging their students and identify areas for improvement.
- ★ **Grown significantly.** CCSSE has surveyed almost 700,000 students from 548 different colleges in 48 states, British Columbia, and the Marshall Islands. Colleges that have participated in CCSSE represent about half of the nation's public community colleges and 56% of the national community college credit student population.
- ★ **Provided colleges with training and online tools** that help them use their data to improve student learning and persistence.
- ★ **Created CCFSSE,** the Community College Faculty Survey of Student Engagement, which helps colleges focus on faculty members' professional roles and instructional practices as well as compare faculty members' and students' perceptions about the educational experience.
- ★ **Established CCSSE's reliability and validity.** CCSSE's validation research shows that the CCSSE survey instrument provides a valuable proxy for student success in community colleges.
- ★ **Initiated the three-year CCSSE cohort,** which further increases the stability of the overall results.
- ★ **Introduced special focus survey items** that each year delve into an issue important to the field. At the same time, the core CCSSE survey remains consistent to allow for year-to-year comparisons.
- ★ **Demonstrated a commitment to transparency and improvement** through public reporting, a no-holds-barred analysis of the data, and an unwavering focus on both challenges and solutions.

## **CCSSE: A Tool for Improvement and Accountability**

Participating colleges use CCSSE as a tool to plan and measure improvement efforts and to demonstrate accountability.

**Improvement.** Increasingly, CCSSE member colleges share their data widely, infuse the use of data throughout their campuses, and apply what they learn to help more students succeed.

This report includes a number of examples of how colleges use CCSSE data to strengthen educational practices, improve student services, and refocus faculty priorities.

**Accountability.** The Secretary of Education's Commission on the Future of Higher Education, created by Education Secretary Margaret Spellings, calls on America's colleges and universities to embrace a culture of continuous innovation and quality improvement. In its September 2006 report, the Commission

presents CCSSE as an exemplar of the publicly reported data that are critical for this work.

Further, the Commission recommends that institutions and accreditors provide more evidence of student achievement and institutional performance and make this information more transparent and easily accessible to the public.

Many CCSSE colleges are using CCSSE to satisfy accreditation requirements. A growing number of colleges in the Southern region, for example, use CCSSE as the basis for their Quality Enhancement Plans (QEP) for SACS accreditation. Among them are **Tallahassee Community College (FL)**, **Owensboro Community and Technical College (KY)**, **Coastal Carolina Community College (NC)**, **Surry Community College (NC)**, and **Galveston College (TX)**.

In the North Central region, **Iowa Valley Community College District (IVCCD)** embraces the concept of continuous quality improvement through its participation in the Higher Learning Commission's Academic Quality Improvement Program (AQIP). IVCCD chose to use CCSSE as part of a comprehensive approach to assessment of institutional effectiveness. After administering the survey, college leaders shared initial results with faculty and staff in fall workshops. Specific findings were used at **Ellsworth Community College, Iowa Valley-Grinnell**, and **Marshalltown Community College** to develop action plans and individual operational goals as part of the continuous improvement planning process.

## Why Student Engagement? Why **CCSSE**?

Research shows that the more actively engaged students are — with college faculty and staff, with other students, and with the subject matter they study — the more likely they are to learn, to stick with their studies, and to attain their academic goals. Student engagement, therefore, is a valuable yardstick for assessing the quality of colleges' educational practices and identifying ways they can produce more successful results — across all subgroups of students.

All *CCSSE* work is grounded in a large body of research about what works in strengthening student learning and persistence. The survey focuses on institutional practices and student behaviors that promote student engagement. *CCSSE* works with participating colleges to administer the survey, which measures students' levels of engagement in a variety of areas. The colleges then receive their survey results, along with guidance and analysis they can use to improve their programs and services for students.

*CCSSE* data analyses include a three-year cohort of participating colleges. Using a three-year cohort increases the number of institutions and students in the national data set, optimizes representation of institutions by size and location, and therefore, increases the stability of the overall results.

This year's three-year cohort — called the 2007 *CCSSE* Cohort — includes all colleges that participated in *CCSSE* from 2005 through 2007. If a college participated more than one time in the three-year period, the cohort includes data only from its most recent year of participation. The 2007 *CCSSE* Cohort includes more than 310,000 students from 525 institutions in 48 states, as well as British Columbia and the Marshall Islands.

In addition, as of 2008, at least 23 states will have committed to statewide use of *CCSSE* as an assessment tool and improvement strategy for their community colleges.

The **Kentucky Community and Technical College System (KCTCS)** uses *CCSSE* as a state-level performance indicator. All KCTCS colleges participate in *CCSSE* on a regular schedule, and KCTCS monitors system-level

benchmark scores. In **Tennessee**, all community colleges participate in *CCSSE* as part of the Tennessee Higher Education Commission's performance-based incentive program. The performance funding program, established in 1979, "financially rewards public colleges and universities for successful institutional performance on selected student outcomes and related academic and institutional assessments."<sup>\*</sup>

*"CCSSE has given community colleges a very powerful tool to use internally to learn what's working and what's not. For the nation, it gives us information about community colleges that simply was not available before."*

— **Vincent Tinto**, Distinguished Professor, Syracuse University

<sup>\*</sup>Tennessee Higher Education Commission, *Performance Funding 2005–10 Cycle*, July 2005.

## Five Lessons Learned

CCSSE's work has contributed to the body of research and practice that together help colleges better engage students, retain students, and increase the likelihood that students will succeed. Here CCSSE offers five lessons learned in its first five years of work.

**Lesson #1: Be intentional.** Engagement doesn't happen by accident; it happens by design. Community colleges serve high percentages of students who juggle school, work, and family care commitments, and who attend college part-time. Most students simply are not on campus enough for engagement to occur spontaneously. Consequently, most students typically do not get the benefit of spur-of-the-moment conversations about coursework or unplanned study sessions. They rarely bump into professors on campus and have serendipitous informal conversations. Community colleges, therefore, must be deliberate and aggressively create opportunities to involve students so that engagement becomes central to every student's experience.

In addition, just as colleges must be intentional about engagement, students must be intentional about their own success. Colleges should find ways to encourage their students to become more purposeful in their educational efforts, from planning the right program to finishing whatever they start, be it a project, course, or a degree. And, while student responsibility

is an important part of this effort, colleges play a critical role because institutional practices affect student behaviors.

Everyone on campus can help in this effort, and colleges often use CCSSE data to start conversations about purposefully engaging students. **South Texas College (TX)**, for example, presented CCSSE data to faculty members to encourage them to be more intentional. The college found CCSSE to be "a perfect tool for planning improvements" because the survey items identify specific actions faculty can take — such as providing prompt feedback to students and communicating with students outside the classroom — to engage students.

**Lesson #2: Engagement matters for all students, but it matters more for some than for others.** In addition to reviewing data for the college as a whole, CCSSE encourages colleges to disaggregate their data so they can compare results for different student groups.

Throughout higher education, there are consistent, unacceptable gaps between outcomes for high-risk students and outcomes for their peers. CCSSE data show that when there are differences

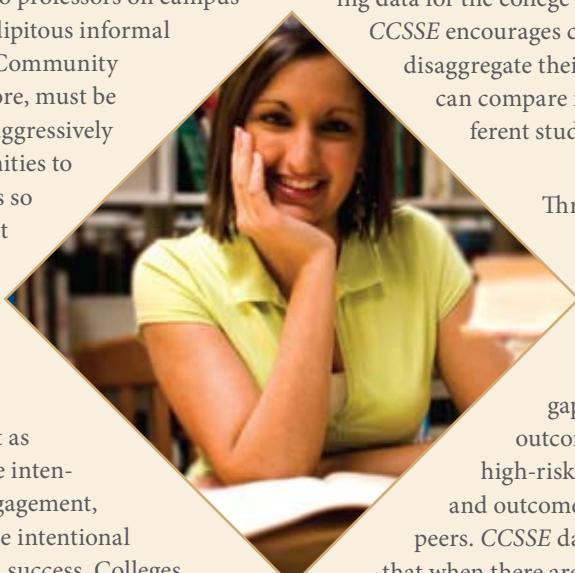
in engagement between low- and high-risk students, the students typically described as high-risk — including academically underprepared students, students of color, first-generation students, and nontraditional learners — are

more engaged in their college experience than their peers.

At the same time, many of these students have lower aspirations and less successful outcomes. In other words, they are working harder, but achieving lower results. It is likely that a number of factors contribute to this reality, and CCSSE speculates that one factor is a compensatory effect: High-risk students are less prepared for college and must be more engaged to attain outcomes that lower-risk students may reach with less effort. Colleges, therefore, should maximize engagement opportunities for their students who are most at risk.

When comparing its 2005 and 2007 CCSSE results, **LaGuardia Community College (NY)** saw an increase in the percentage of students reporting that they *likely* or *very likely* would withdraw from college because they were academically underprepared. In response, college leaders intensified instructional and support services for basic skills students. Also between 2005 and 2007, LaGuardia saw an increase in the percentage of students reporting that their friends and family are supportive of their college work. During that time period, the college had instituted family orientations and encouraged students to share their e-portfolios with family and friends — actions that may be the reason for this increased support.

**Lesson #3: Part-time students and faculty are the reality of community colleges — and typically are not adequately addressed in improvement efforts.** Close to two-thirds of community college students attend college part-time, and about two-thirds of community college faculty members teach part-time.\*



\*U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2004 National Study of Postsecondary Faculty (NSOPF: 04) Report on Faculty and Instructional Staff in Fall 2003, May 2005.

**Part-time students.** There is ample evidence that attending college part-time puts students at greater risk of not attaining their educational goals. A recent report from the National Center for Education Statistics found that even controlling for factors like gender, family income, and educational expectations, part-time undergraduate students were less likely than full-time students both to persist and to attain degrees. Only 15% of part-time students completed a degree or certificate six years after enrolling, and 73% left college without earning a degree.

By contrast, 64% of full-time students earned either a degree or certificate within six years, and 72% persisted (either earned a degree or were still enrolled in college).\*

While this study included part-time students at both two- and four-year colleges, the overwhelming majority of part-time students attend two-year colleges. Thus, it is at community colleges that part-time students will, in large part, succeed or fail.

CCSSE data show that part-time students report lower levels of engagement behaviors than their full-time peers, a finding that may be unsurprising. Nonetheless, community colleges that are serious about improving student success must focus their efforts on strategies that will more effectively engage part-time students.



Colleges can better address the needs of part-time students by introducing more engagement opportunities into their day-to-day activities — either by making the engagement mandatory or by building it into the classroom experience. Colleges can, for example, require part-time students to take placement tests so that those who need remediation will be enrolled in appropriate developmental education classes. They can link required student success courses to those developmental education classes. They can require advising for part-time students and make participation in study groups mandatory. Colleges also can build class schedules and support services around the schedules of part-time students.

Some colleges already are undertaking efforts like these. **Ivy Tech Community College-Central Indiana (IN)** expanded hours for student services to better accommodate students' schedules. Advising and other student services now are available from 8am to 7pm Monday to Thursday, 8am to 5pm on Friday, and 9am to noon on Saturday.

After collecting data on student attendance and success in gatekeeper courses, **Paul D. Camp Community College (VA)** found that students with better attendance had higher course grades than those who missed classes — an unsurprising finding, but one that

presents an opportunity for change. The college started an attendance program for all gatekeeper courses. Faculty members now spend more time and attention on interventions to help increase attendance, such as giving weekly quizzes and initiating personal contact with students.

**Part-time faculty.** Colleges are recognizing that they must change the way they approach the 67% of their faculty members who, on average, are employed part-time. Most part-time faculty members spend limited time on campus. Their responsibilities typically do not extend beyond teaching the classes assigned to them, and they typically do not participate in strategic planning and other activities that drive the college's priorities. At many community colleges, part-time faculty do not have office space where they can meet with students, and they are not paid for the time they spend doing so. And too often, the professional development opportunities that help full-time faculty develop more engaging teaching strategies are not extended to (or convenient for) part-time instructors.

CCFSSE data indicate that part-time faculty respondents spend significantly less time with students outside the classroom than full-time faculty respondents. More than four of five (82%) of part-time faculty respondents versus 48% of full-time faculty respondents report that they typically spend zero hours per week working with students on activities other than coursework. Fewer than half of part-time faculty respondents (46%), compared with nearly three-quarters of full-time faculty respondents (73%), say they typically spend up to eight hours per week interacting with students outside the classroom.

\*U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, *Part-Time Undergraduates in Postsecondary Education: 2003–04. Postsecondary Education Descriptive Analysis Report (NCES 2007-165)*, 2007.

Refocusing work with part-time faculty can improve the educational experience of all students, but it likely will have the greatest effect on part-time students; this is because part-time faculty are more likely than full-timers to teach at night and on weekends, when part-time students are more likely to take classes.

Some colleges already are taking steps to better engage part-time faculty members. At both **Dona Ana Community College (NM)** and **El Paso Community College (TX)**, for example, part-time faculty members participate in professional development as well as discussions about CCSSE data and plans for improving student learning.

**Lesson #4: Data are our friends.** Since its inception, CCSSE has encouraged colleges to build a culture of evidence — a culture in which administrators, faculty, and staff consider data to be signposts that their college can use to set goals, monitor progress, and improve practice. All of these stakeholders regularly review data on student engagement, progress, and achievement, and they make decisions based on what these data show.

Individuals operating within a culture of evidence embrace data, sharing them honestly and unflinchingly, and use them to assess student and institutional performance and to identify means for improvement. These individuals know that transparency builds credibility, ownership, and support for change.

Creating a culture of evidence is difficult work. Data can challenge assumptions and traditions, threaten the status quo, and disrupt informal power structures. Richard Rhodes, president of **El Paso**

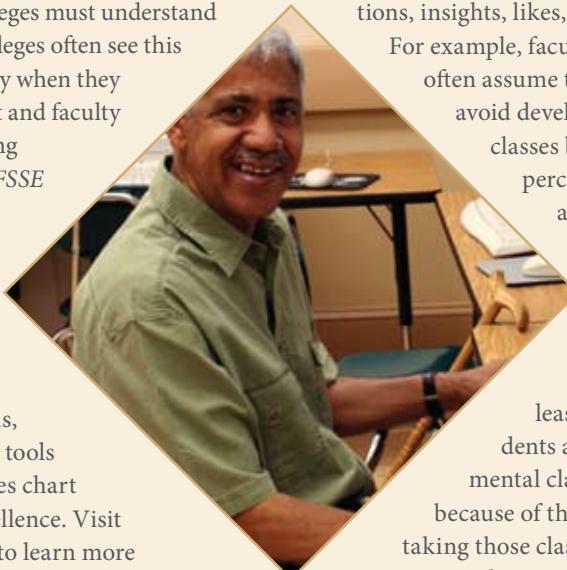
*"The real key is not just what students are doing, but what institutions are doing that will lead students to do the kinds of things that result in the desired outcomes."*

— George Kuh, Director, National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE); Chancellor's Professor and Director, Indiana University Center for Postsecondary Research

**Community College (TX)** describes his college's introduction to data, particularly disaggregated data, as *eye opening*. "For the first time, everyone could see what was working for which groups of students," he recalls.

Through CCSSE, colleges are learning that data often conflict with individuals' observations. Personal experiences provide only anecdotal information that likely reflects the experience of only a handful of students — the ones the observer knows best. By contrast, systematically collected data show the typical student experience, and that is what colleges must understand to improve. Colleges often see this difference clearly when they contrast student and faculty perceptions using CCSSE and CCFSSE results.

Whether they reveal surprises or confirm our expectations, data are critical tools that help colleges chart a course to excellence. Visit [www.ccsse.org](http://www.ccsse.org) to learn more about how colleges operating within a culture of evidence employ a never-ending cycle of gathering, analyzing, and using data.



#### **Lesson #5: Look behind the numbers.**

Colleges that are working within a culture of evidence know that looking at survey data answers some questions — and it raises others. This is because quantitative data tell us *what* is happening, but they don't tell us *why* it's happening. CCSSE encourages colleges to go deeper to learn more.

**Qualitative data.** Student focus groups, which provide qualitative data about student perceptions, are one way to go deeper. These sessions are a source of rich information about student observations, insights, likes, and dislikes.

For example, faculty and staff often assume that students avoid developmental classes because of a perceived stigma associated with remediation.

Focus groups, however, reveal that at least some students avoid developmental classes primarily because of their experience taking those classes. In focus groups, students typically don't talk about stigma; they are more likely to report frustration with instructors who were not helpful or placement in developmental classes that were either too hard or too easy.

**Relationships.** CCSSE also looks behind the numbers on a national scale. Since 2002, the *MetLife Foundation Initiative on Student Success* (a CCSSE project) has recognized 16 community colleges for exemplary performance in strengthening student retention. Based on these colleges' experiences, as well as a growing body of research, it is clear that developing relationships — with other students, faculty, and staff — is a significant contributor to students' success. CCSSE has conducted qualitative research with these colleges to better understand how and why these relationships promote student success.

For example, responding to research findings that “time-on-task” would likely benefit developmental students, **Parkland College (IL)** created formal faculty-facilitated study groups. Led by full-time mathematics faculty, the study groups help students hone academic skills while building relationships that provide support. Group activities focus on study skills and include professional tutoring, supplemental instruction, academic follow-up, and, when appropriate, computer-assisted instruction. Parkland reports that persistence rates for students in study groups increased by 25%, with almost three-fourths of those participating completing their developmental courses.

Many students at **Maui Community College (HI)** are of Japanese and Chinese ancestry. Both of these cultures, along with native Hawaiian culture, value relationships, and the college intentionally

## Putting Student Engagement in Context

There are no shortcuts to student success at community colleges. In fact, many students experience long detours in their educational paths unless their colleges help them stay on track. *CCSSE* is a tool that helps community colleges better accomplish this goal. To understand why *CCSSE* data are so valuable, one must understand the context in which community colleges serve their students.

Community colleges:

- ★ provide full access to education through open admissions;
- ★ serve a diverse mix of students with dramatically varying goals, from earning a degree to obtaining on-the-job training;
- ★ serve students who have significant time commitments — to their families, their jobs, and their communities — in addition to their studies;
- ★ serve students who likely attend college part-time and, therefore, spend limited time on campus;
- ★ serve students who were not well served by their previous public school education and, therefore, are likely to have academic challenges;
- ★ serve students who are highly qualified academically but seek an affordable and accessible start to their college experience;
- ★ serve disproportionately high numbers of low-income and first-generation college students; and
- ★ address all of these challenges while dealing with severe resource constraints.

Addressing these issues shapes every aspect of the critical work of community colleges. It is a formidable challenge, but community colleges are committed to serving every student who walks through their doors — and *CCSSE* is committed to helping them do so effectively.

builds on this cultural norm. The college involves student representatives in meetings, developing a shared responsibility for decisions and ensuring that relationships remain strong. This approach engages students on their own terms.

Similarly, Hispanic communities tend to place a high value on family and other relationships. Colleges with large Hispanic student populations may find it easier to engage these students if they engage their families and communities.

*“When we know something, based in research, it’s up to us to take action, to cause something to happen — not based on whims, not based on, ‘well I had one student who did this one time,’ but based on research.”*

— Bill Law, President, Tallahassee Community College (FL)

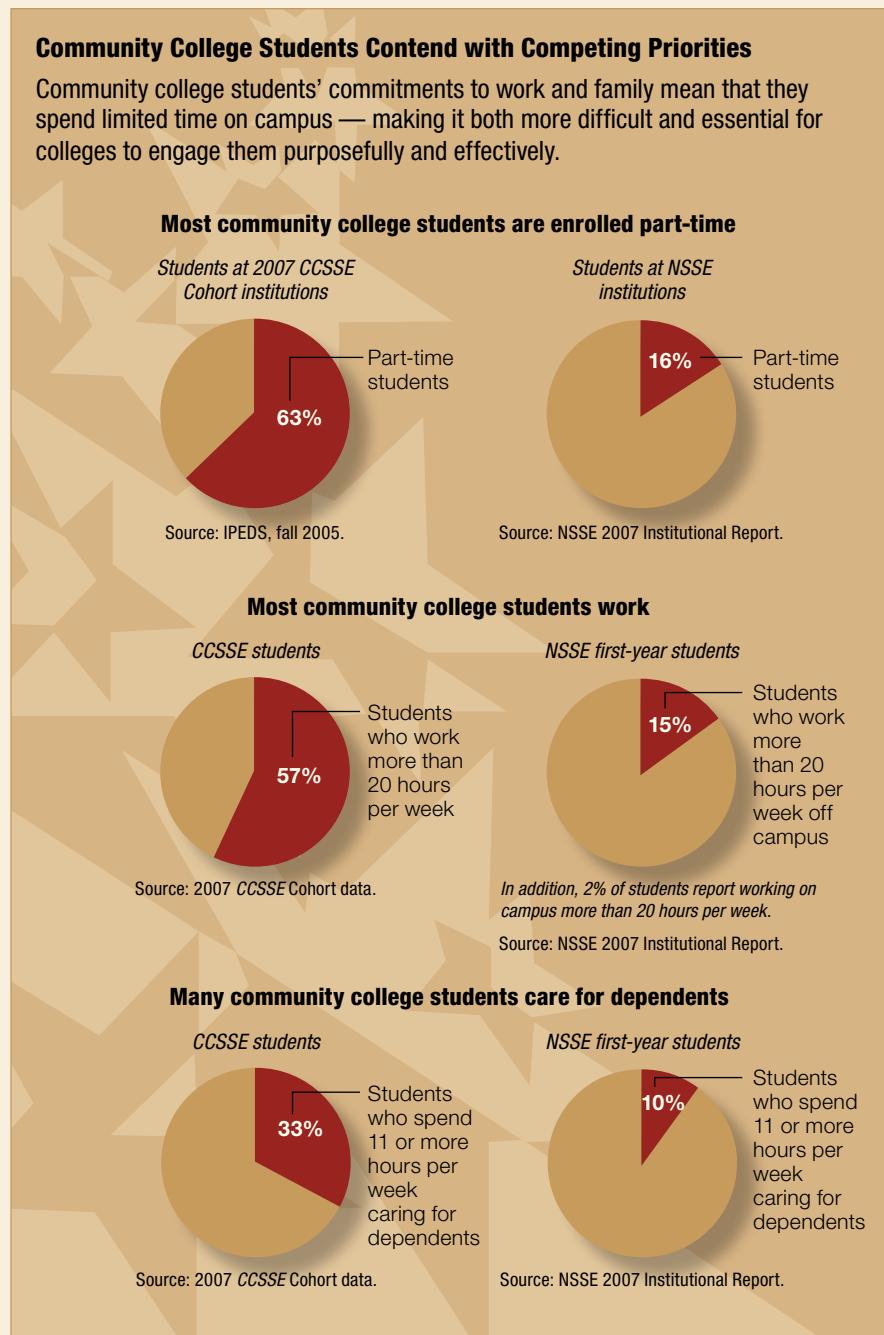
**Research Program.** CCSSE is looking behind its numbers with research that contributes to the body of knowledge about community colleges and their students. Last year, CCSSE completed its validation research, which shows that CCSSE is measuring institutional practices and student behaviors that matter.

The research (available at [www.ccsse.org/publications](http://www.ccsse.org/publications)) demonstrates a positive relationship between students' self-reported level of engagement (the data collected by CCSSE) and better outcomes for community college students.

In future years, CCSSE will continue its program of research, focusing on questions identified as valuable to community colleges in their improvement efforts.

## Characteristics of Community College Students

Community colleges educate a diverse mix of students with dramatically varying goals; significant demands on their time; and a range of personal, academic, and financial challenges. The charts to the right compare data from CCSSE with data from the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE), which measures student engagement among students at four-year colleges and universities. These comparisons underscore what makes community college students unique.



*"Through surveys and interviews, students have told us that they would still like to spend quality time at the campus. It means a lot to them to interact with our faculty when they're out of class; it means a lot to them to be engaged with other students in social ways as well as learning ways throughout the college."*

— Jerry Sue Thornton, President, Cuyahoga Community College (OH)

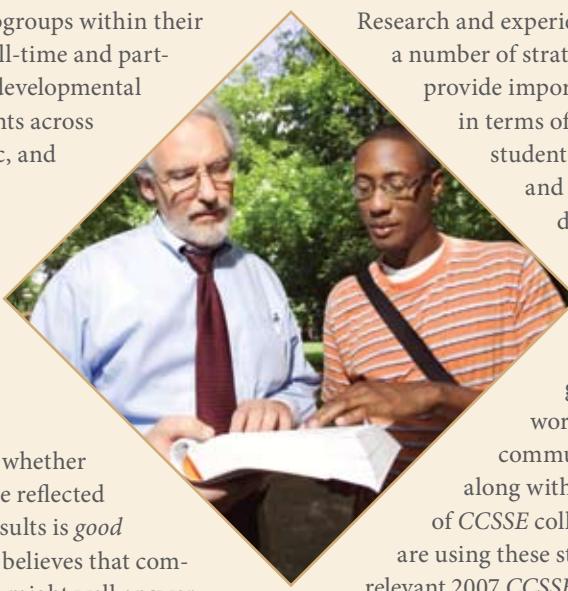
# Five Strategies That Work

Every year, CCSSE results bring good news about how community colleges are using data to restructure students' educational experiences and maximize student engagement. But the data also reveal where individual colleges, and the field as a whole, have work to do.

Even the highest performing colleges have greater success in some areas than in others and can find areas for improvement. Indeed, the data consistently show that there typically is more variability within an individual college than among the colleges overall. Individual colleges learn about their own strengths and weaknesses by disaggregating their data and measuring their overall performance against results for their least engaged group. Colleges might aspire to making

sure that all subgroups within their populations (full-time and part-time students; developmental students; students across all racial, ethnic, and income groups; etc.) engage at similarly high levels.

As a group, community colleges should continue to ask whether the performance reflected in the survey results is *good enough*. CCSSE believes that community colleges might well answer this question the way that any organization seeking excellence would: No matter how good we are today, it is neither as good as we need to be nor as good as we are capable of becoming.



Research and experience point to a number of strategies that can provide important returns in terms of strengthened student engagement and improved student outcomes.

The following pages describe five strategies that are working for community colleges, along with examples of CCSSE colleges that are using these strategies and relevant 2007 CCSSE and CCFSE findings. Please note that survey items and CCSSE benchmarks are not tied to specific strategies. In fact, the best engagement strategies likely will have an impact on a range of survey items and benchmarks.

## The CCSSE Benchmarks of Effective Educational Practice

Benchmarks are groups of conceptually related survey items that address key areas of student engagement. CCSSE's five benchmarks comprise 38 engagement items that reflect many of the most important aspects of the student experience. The benchmarks measure behaviors that educational research has shown to be powerful contributors to effective teaching, learning, and student retention.

The CCSSE benchmarks are **active and collaborative learning, student effort, academic challenge, student-faculty interaction, and support for learners**.

Every college has a score for each benchmark. These individual benchmark scores are computed by averaging the scores on survey items comprising that benchmark. Benchmark scores are standardized so that the mean — the average of all participating students — always is 50 and the standard deviation is 25.

The standardized scores provide an easy way to assess whether an individual college is performing above or below the mean (50) on each benchmark. They also make it possible for colleges to compare their own performance across benchmarks and with groups of similar colleges.

Visit [www.ccsse.org](http://www.ccsse.org) to see descriptions of the benchmarks, specific survey items associated with each benchmark, and key findings organized by benchmark.

## Strategy #1: Set High Expectations and Clear Goals

### *The Strategy*

**Setting and communicating high expectations.** Every college has a stated commitment to educating all students, but their actions tell us more than their mission statements. Even a casual visitor can walk onto a college campus and know, almost instantly, whether the college community *believes* that all students can learn. Do they look at their students in terms of attributes or deficits? Do they talk about difficult subjects or difficult students? The students' ability to learn or the students' right to fail? Institutions that expect students to perform well use language that communicates students' value and potential.

This language helps set high expectations for students — and it is contagious. In high-expectation cultures, students who need developmental education start to believe, some of them for the first time, that they are capable of college-level work. Those who come to college seeking an associate degree start planning for the bachelor's degree they'll earn next. When colleges believe in their students and push them to do more, the students' aspirations rise.

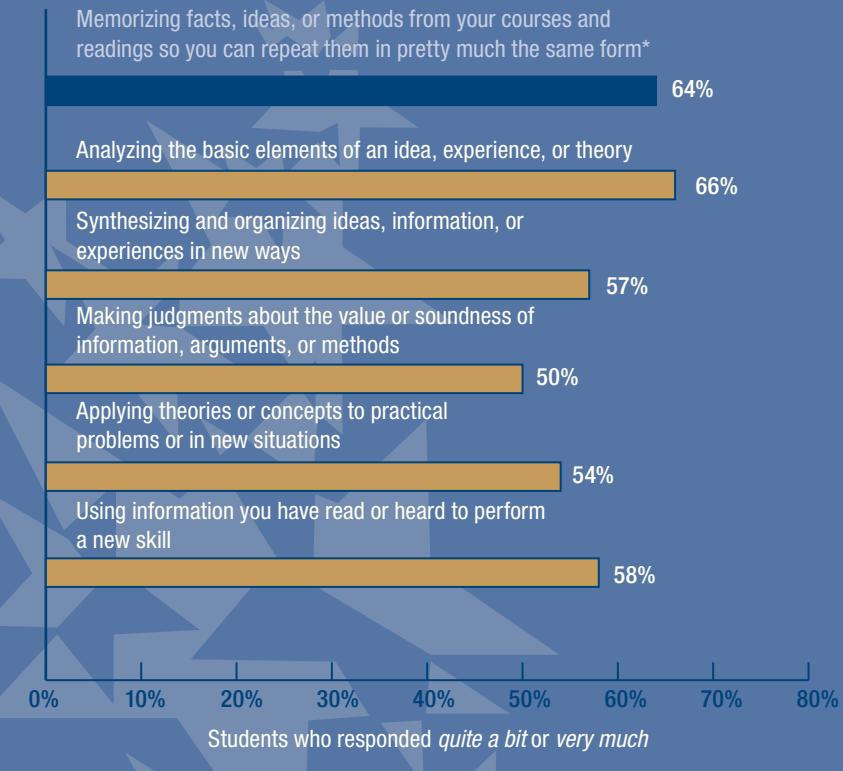
Indeed, Vincent Tinto, distinguished professor at Syracuse University and a recognized national expert on college student retention, cites high expectations as a critical factor in student success. Summarizing key aspects of his research, he asserts, "No one rises to low expectations."

Items that make up the **academic challenge** benchmark reflect a college's expectations of its students. For example,

### CCSSE BENCHMARK

#### Key Findings for Academic Challenge

During the current school year, how much has your coursework at this college emphasized the following mental activities?



\*This survey item is not part of the academic challenge benchmark but is included here for purposes of comparison.

Source: 2007 CCSSE Cohort data.

57% of 2007 CCSSE Cohort respondents report that their college emphasizes synthesizing and organizing ideas, information, or experiences in new ways *quite a bit or very much*, and 50% say their college emphasizes making judgments about the value or soundness of information or arguments *quite a bit or very much*. These are recognized as examples of higher-order thinking, an indicator of greater academic challenge. By contrast,

64% of 2007 CCSSE Cohort respondents report that their college emphasizes the rote work of memorizing facts and ideas *quite a bit or very much*.

**Setting goals and providing the support to meet them.** Increasing expectations is only one step toward success. For too many students, the journey starts and ends with aspiration because they don't have a clear path toward their goals.

## CCFSSE: The Faculty Perspective

The Community College Faculty Survey of Student Engagement (*CCFSSE*), which is aligned with *CCSSE*, elicits information from faculty about their teaching practices, the ways they spend time both in and out of class, and their perceptions regarding students' educational experiences.

*CCFSSE* now is in its third year, and this year, all *CCFSSE* analyses use a three-year cohort of participating colleges. The 2007 *CCFSSE* Cohort includes all colleges that participated in *CCFSSE* in 2005, 2006, and 2007 (each college's most recent year of participation).

All institutions that participated in the 2007 administration of the *CCSSE* survey were invited to participate in *CCFSSE*, which was administered online. At colleges that chose to participate, every faculty member teaching credit classes in the spring term was eligible to respond to the survey, and faculty respondents generally mirror the national two-year college faculty population. The notable exception is employment status: Nationally, 33% of two-year college faculty members are employed full-time, while 60% of 2007 *CCFSSE* Cohort respondents are employed full-time. For more information about *CCFSSE*, visit [www.ccsse.org](http://www.ccsse.org).

In the 2007 *CCSSE* Cohort, 58% of students identify earning an associate degree as a primary goal, and 51% say transferring to a four-year institution is a primary goal. But many students, particularly those entering college for the first time, may have only a vague sense of what it will take to attain these goals. Some are surprised to learn that they must pass one or more developmental education classes before they can start college-level work. Others aren't sure which classes will help them reach their goals.

Colleges can help their students turn these wishes into concrete plans by setting clear goals and giving students the

support to meet them. This means providing academic advising and planning to help students create academic road maps that show the path from where they are to where they want to be — and then offering tutoring, study labs, and other services that help students successfully navigate the journey.

### *The Strategy Applied*

Lack of direction may explain, in part, why attrition is so high at community colleges. Asked when they plan to take classes at their college again, nearly one-quarter (23%) of students in the 2007 *CCSSE* Cohort say they have no current plan to return or they are uncertain.

*"If you want students to succeed, you need to have high expectations. Students know if you're watering down or caving in."*

— Richard Rhodes, President, El Paso Community College (TX)

Responding to its 2004 results for this survey item, **Miami Dade College (FL)** developed long-term academic planners, which now are available online. Students use the planners to map out their courses so they can see the sequence of classes they need to take. Students can track their progress from term to term, all the way to earning a degree or certificate. The college reports that after students began to use this planning tool, the college's *CCSSE* results showed a substantial drop in the percentage of students who had no intention to re-enroll within 12 months. That figure dropped from 25% in 2004 to 21% in 2007.

After *CCSSE* results revealed that students thought the college focused more on memorization than critical thinking, **Tallahassee Community College (FL)** intentionally infused higher-order thinking skills throughout its curriculum. The college also developed learning communities that address students' needs along a continuum from novice to experienced learners.

In addition to raising expectations for students, some colleges also raise them for faculty members. **Dona Ana Community College (NM)** is explicit about every individual's responsibility to promote improvement on *CCSSE* benchmarks. In fact, faculty members' responsibilities for providing support for learners, including advising and connecting students to support services, are built into faculty goals each year, and the use of data and assessment is connected to faculty promotions and pay increases.

## Strategy #2: Focus on the Front Door

### The Strategy

By all measures, attrition, particularly in the first semester, is a significant problem for community colleges and their students; community colleges typically lose about half of their students prior to the students' second college year.

Current research indicates that helping students succeed through the equivalent of the first semester (12–15 credit hours) can dramatically improve retention. Successfully completing the first semester, moreover, improves students' chances of attaining further milestones and, ultimately, earning certificates and degrees.

Colleges must address the precipitous loss of new students by focusing on the front door — designing engagement efforts that capture students from the moment of their first interactions with the college. These efforts are particularly important for colleges that serve large proportions of first-generation college students and other students who are likely to be unfamiliar with negotiating a college campus. First-generation students make up one-third (34%) of the 2007 CCSSE Cohort.

Undoubtedly, academic advising and planning are central to any strategy that focuses on entering students. Items associated with the **support for learners** benchmark show how often students use these and other services as well as how much they value those services. Every year, CCSSE respondents place the highest value on academic advising, and consistently, there is a gap between the

percentage of students who value advising and those who use it. In the 2007 CCSSE cohort, 89% of respondents say that academic advising and planning are *somewhat* or *very important*; 54% report using that service *sometimes* or *often*, and more than a third of students say they *rarely* or *never* use this service.

Students not only value advising, but also they place a premium on certain advisors. The 2006 CCSSE special focus questions revealed that students identify faculty members as their best source of academic guidance. Yet 2007 CCFSSE results show that 23% of faculty typically spend zero hours per week advising students.

### CCSSE BENCHMARK

#### Key Findings for Support for Learners

How often do you use the following services?

	Often	Rarely/never
Academic advising/planning	12%	36%
Career counseling	5%	50%
Job placement assistance	3%	46%
Peer or other tutoring	7%	46%
Skill labs (writing, math, etc.)	14%	37%
Child care	2%	37%
Financial aid advising	17%	32%
Computer lab	32%	24%
Student organizations	5%	44%

How important are the following services?

	Very	Not at all
Academic advising/planning	61%	11%
Career counseling	50%	22%
Job placement assistance	36%	36%
Peer or other tutoring	39%	30%
Skill labs (writing, math, etc.)	43%	25%
Child care	27%	55%
Financial aid advising	60%	23%
Computer lab	59%	16%
Student organizations	23%	42%

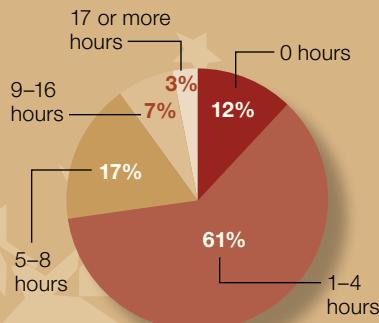
Source: 2007 CCSSE Cohort data.

Disaggregating the data uncovers an even greater gap between students' reported needs for advising and faculty members' reported advising activities. Nearly four in 10 part-time faculty members (39%) report spending zero hours

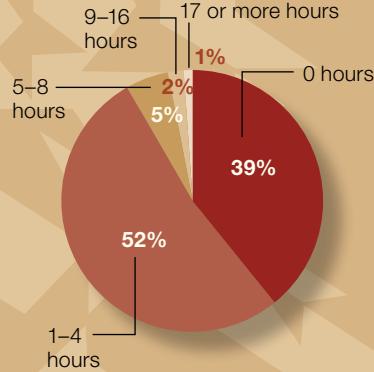
### CCFSSE: Time Spent Advising Students

*About how many hours do you spend in a typical seven-day week advising students?*

#### Responses of full-time faculty



#### Responses of part-time faculty



*Note: Percentages may not total 100% due to rounding.*

Source: 2007 CCFSSE Cohort data.

in a typical week advising students. As mentioned earlier, about two-thirds of community college faculty members teach part-time. These faculty members, moreover, typically teach half to two-thirds of all course sections. If a significant portion of part-time faculty is not advising students, then a large percentage of students may have little opportunity to receive guidance from faculty members.

In addition to advising, engagement efforts that focus on entering students, such as orientation and student success courses, typically help students make connections to other students, faculty, and staff. Ideally, these experiences also build academic skills and connect students to academic tools and support services, helping them find the resources they will need to succeed at the college.

And there is evidence that these interventions — student success courses in particular — are related to improved student achievement. The Community College Research Center (CCRC) found that Florida community college students who take a student success course are 8% more likely to earn a certificate or associate degree than are students who do not take such a course. CCRC found that all but two of the 28 Florida community colleges are seeing positive results from these courses.\*

#### The Strategy Applied

**Santa Ana College (CA)** offers entering students the opportunity to participate in The Freshman Experience Program (FEP), which gives new students valuable tips related to studying, note-taking,

time management, and other skills. Santa Ana's research shows that FEP students are more likely to pass their classes and complete their first year of college than entering students who aren't part of the program. FEP students also indicate they are more satisfied with the effectiveness of their learning experience and the availability of career guidance from the faculty than are non-FEP students.

**Valencia Community College (FL)** made a number of changes — such as requiring new students to attend orientation and better enforcing prerequisites and college prep course sequences — to engage students earlier and more effectively. Valencia also paired its student success course with two levels of developmental mathematics as a part of its Learning in Community (LinC) program. Faculty partners working with a success coach designed the LinC course collaboratively and included lessons that integrate both disciplines. As part of the program, a success coach (an advisor or counselor) offers personalized advising and support for educational and life success.

At **College of the Marshall Islands (Republic of the Marshall Islands)**, the native language of virtually all students is Marshallese, but classes are taught in English. The college, therefore, has a significant focus on English as a Second Language (ESL) instruction. All faculty members participate in an ESL instructional certification program, through which they learn techniques for working with ESL students, including approaches that focus on active learning.

\*Zeidenberg, M., D. Jenkins, and J.C. Calcagno, *Do Student Success Courses Actually Help Community College Students Succeed? (CCRC Brief No. 36)* (New York: Community College Research Center, Teachers College, Columbia University), June 2007.

**Skagit Valley College (WA)** has piloted a Counselor-Enhanced Developmental Learning Community model. The year-long pilot fully integrates advising and student success skills into the developmental learning community curriculum. Desired outcomes include improving retention of new students, improving student persistence through developmental education and to college-level work, and developing academic faculty advising skills.

### Strategy #3: Elevate Developmental Education

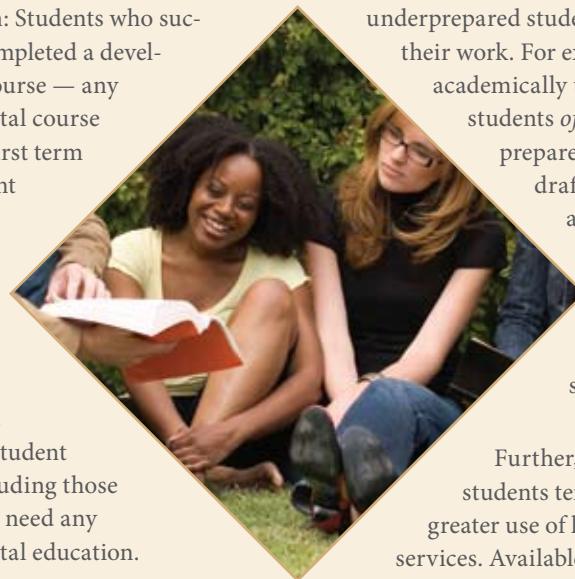
#### *The Strategy*

It is estimated that up to 61% of all first-time community college students are assessed as underprepared for the academic demands of college-level courses, and the numbers are far higher in some settings.\* Community colleges cannot significantly strengthen student success unless they first focus on providing effective developmental education and appropriate levels of student support.

Research shows that effective remediation pays high dividends, but success may depend on early intervention. Consider the following findings from Achieving the Dream, which is tracking cohorts of students from more than 80 colleges in 15 states.

Data from the initial 27 Achieving the Dream colleges show that among students who began in developmental math, only 17% had completed their developmental math sequences two years into their college experience. Additional

research among the same 27 colleges, however, shows the value of early intervention: Students who successfully completed a developmental course — any developmental course — in their first term of enrollment were, from that point forward, more likely to persist and succeed than other student groups, including those who did not need any developmental education.



solid results. Items in the **student effort** benchmark consistently show the effort underprepared students put into their work. For example, 59% of academically underprepared students *often or very often* prepare two or more drafts of a paper or assignment before turning it in, versus 42% of academically prepared students.

Further, underprepared students tend to make greater use of key support services. Available data, however, also reveal that these students are less likely to attain successful outcomes.

Given these findings, colleges that want to better serve academically underprepared students may choose to focus more attention and resources on supporting these students in their first semester of work. This support should begin with accurate and effective placement information. It also should include making sure that there are enough developmental course sections — and that all are taught by qualified faculty who want to teach them. And colleges should look at outcomes for academically underprepared students — percentages of students who successfully complete developmental courses and begin college-level work — to evaluate strategies and adjust them if necessary.

Finally, colleges should pay attention to the academically underprepared students who are working hard but not getting

Colleges focused on improving outcomes therefore will place particular priority on identifying interventions that may help students successfully complete remediation and progress to college-level work.

#### *The Strategy Applied*

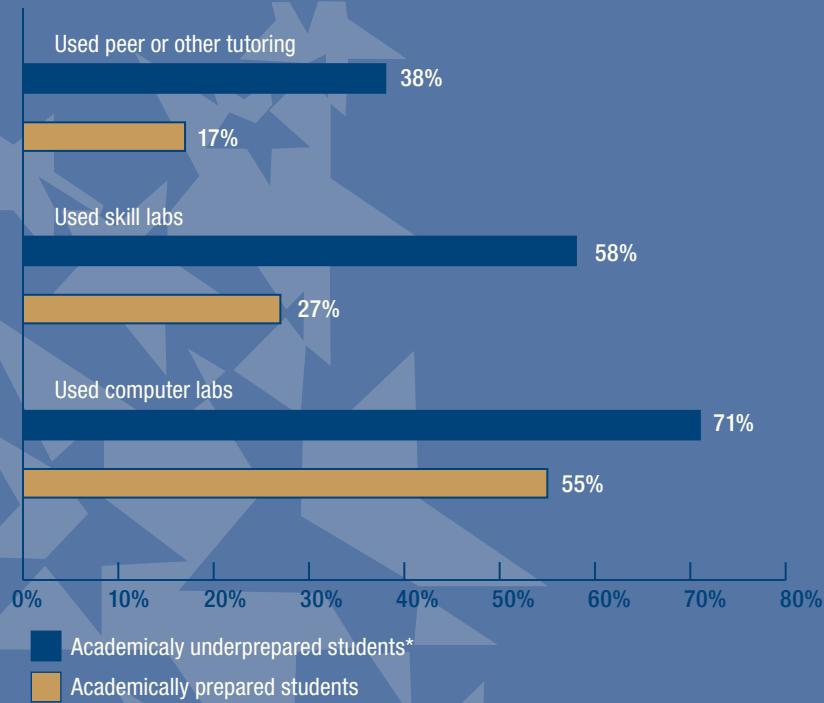
Almost *all* entering students at **El Paso Community College District (TX)** are placed into a developmental math class. Using data as the starting point, El Paso has moved purposefully to strengthen its delivery of developmental math courses. In addition, the college reached out to its community, building partnerships that will result in better-prepared high school students and increasing the chances that more high school students will go to college and succeed in their coursework.

\*Adelman, C. *Principal Indicators of Student Academic Histories in Postsecondary Education, 1972–2000* (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences), January 2004.

## CCSSE BENCHMARK

### Student Effort: Academically Underprepared Students' Use of Services

Percentage of students responding *sometimes or often*



\*Students who have taken or plan to take developmental reading, writing, and math

Source: 2007 CCSSE Cohort data.

Last year, through the El Paso Area College Readiness Consortium, students in six local high school districts took the college placement exam during their senior year. This allowed the districts to provide refresher courses or other interventions for students who didn't pass, so the students would be less likely to need developmental education when they enrolled at El Paso. Students also are encouraged to take college classes while they still are in high school (dual enrollment) so they can accumulate

college credits as they finish high school. Students academically prepared to enroll in college courses during high school can complete as many as 24 credit hours by the time they complete high school at no cost to the student.

*"The attitude used to be that anybody can teach our learning support services classes. Not anymore. We made the decision to invest in our developmental education faculty."*

— Paula Payne, Vice President, Georgia Military Institute (GA)

At **Georgia Military College (GA)**, more than 60% of first-time full-time students place into developmental education. To address their needs, the college focused on Compass scores to make sure they were placing students accurately. The college also decided to place a priority on helping faculty members who teach developmental education strengthen their skills. GMC sent four full-time faculty members to Kellogg Institute Training and Certification Program, which is part of the National Center for Developmental Education at Appalachian State University. At the Institute, faculty received advanced professional training to expand their knowledge of the field and to improve GMC's own developmental program. Preliminary data indicate that quarterly retention of developmental education students is higher than retention of other students.

### Broward Community College (FL)

has an intensive coaching program that focuses on the college's "3/2 students" — those who place into remediation in three subjects (English, reading, and math) and require at least two levels of remediation in at least two of these subjects. Seventy-five percent of students who participated in the coaching program reported that the information or advice they received from their coaches helped them achieve greater success in their classes.

## Strategy #4: Use Engaging Instructional Approaches

### The Strategy

Most community college students are attending college part-time, working, and commuting. Many also are caring for dependents. Given these competing priorities, most students spend little time on campus beyond the time they attend classes. Indeed, CCSSE data indicate that overall, the most successful engagement strategies are likely to happen in classrooms.

The value of capitalizing on the time students spend in class is illustrated by items from the **active and collaborative learning** benchmark. These data consistently show that students are more engaged in the classroom than anywhere else. For example, whereas 21% of students *often or very often* work with classmates outside of class to prepare assignments, more than double that number, 45%, *often or very often* work with other students on projects during class.

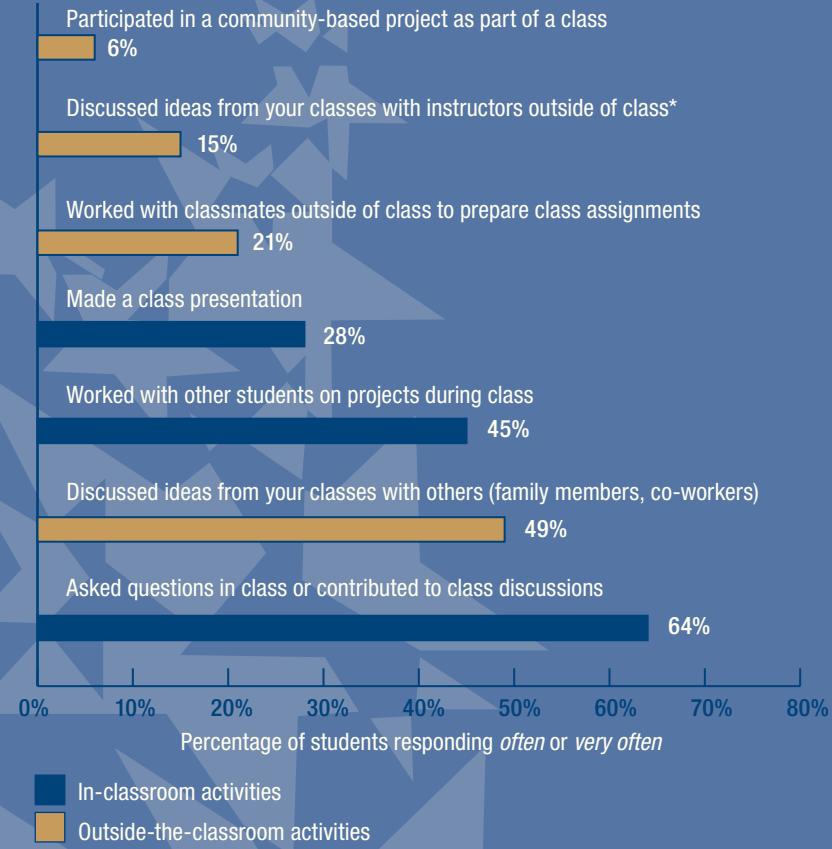
CCSSE research shows that active and collaborative learning is broadly related to a range of student outcomes, including persistence and academic achievement. Colleges and their faculty can play to the strength of in-class engagement and maximize use of instructional approaches that engage students.

CCFSSE data, particularly those concerning how faculty members use class time, also provide useful insights. Almost a third of faculty respondents (31%) report that they spend more than half of their class time lecturing. More than one-fifth of respondents (21%) spend zero hours on small group activities; nearly three-quarters of respondents (74%) spend less than 20% of class time on

### CCSSE BENCHMARK

#### Active and Collaborative Learning: Engagement In and Out of the Classroom

In your experience at this college during the current school year, about how often have you done each of the following?



\*This survey item is not part of the active and collaborative learning benchmark but is included here to help illustrate the differences in student experiences inside and outside the classroom.

Source: 2007 CCSSE Cohort data.

such activities. At the same time, more than half of respondents (52%) spend less than 20% of class time on teacher-led discussion. Colleges can use these data to encourage faculty members to use more

engaging instructional strategies and to identify areas of focus for professional development.

### CCFSSE: How Faculty Members Use Class Time

In your selected course section, on average, what percentage of class time is spent on each of these activities?

	0%	1–19%	20–49%	50–74%	75–100%
Lecture	2%	28%	39%	22%	9%
Teacher-led discussion	4%	48%	38%	8%	3%
Teacher-student shared responsibility	25%	46%	23%	5%	2%
Small group activities	21%	53%	21%	4%	1%
Student presentations	40%	48%	9%	2%	1%
In-class writing	50%	40%	7%	1%	1%
Experiential	65%	17%	11%	4%	2%
Hands-on practice	27%	34%	22%	9%	8%

*Note: Percentages may not total 100% due to rounding.*

#### The Strategy Applied

At **Big Sandy Community and Technical College (KY)** faculty members have focused on using more group exercises in the classroom. In some classes, instructors ask students very specific questions and then use their answers to teach the other students. In others, students are given tests as individuals and then given the same test to take as a group. One faculty member had every student in her English composition class set personal goals and then share them with the class. Students kept journals about their goals, and at the end of the semester the class had an open discussion about next steps.

**Northwest Vista College (TX)** has identified active and collaborative learning as an organizational priority. Full-time and part-time faculty at the college participate in professional development that focuses on strengthening these instructional skills.

Rather than singling out high-risk students for attention, **Tidewater Community College (VA)** targeted such high-risk classes as college algebra. Supplemental Instructors (SIs) attend the classes and later meet with students, leading them through discussions about

what they learned — or didn't — in class. SIs are trained to help students develop skills that apply throughout their college careers and beyond: using study time effectively, monitoring their own learning, and learning how to work in groups.

In the first year of implementation, the SI program focused on college algebra. More than three-quarters (77%) of students in SI-supported classes passed, while 65% of students in non-supported classes passed. In the second year, SI-supported classes expanded to pre-calculus and freshman composition. In pre-calculus classes, 70% of SI-supported students passed, compared to 60% of non-supported students. In composition classes, the passing rate was 83% of SI-supported students, compared to 69% of students in non-supported classes.

**Gainesville State College (GA)** integrates technology into the fabric of the college, using it to personalize the student experience and better connect students with faculty and staff. For example, e-mail is the official means of communication at the college. In addition to giving each student an e-mail address, each class section automatically serves as an e-mail group for class correspondence. Web-based tools promote advisor-student interaction. All classrooms are technology-rich “smart classrooms,” and wireless hubs are available throughout the campus.

*“We participate in CCSSE to continually improve the quality of education we offer our students. Understanding where we are now is critical to determining where we should go and how we can get there.”*

— Kenneth Walker, District President, Edison College (FL)

## Strategy # 5: Make Engagement Inescapable

### *The Strategy*

Colleges are most likely to engage students when they make engagement inescapable. For example, survey items from the **student-faculty interaction** benchmark show that students and faculty members are most likely to interact when they already are in the same place — the classroom. Strikingly, only 15% of students say they discussed ideas from classes with instructors outside the classroom *often* or *very often*, and nearly half (47%) say they *never* had such conversations.

But colleges and their faculty members can set the tone for — and set the terms of — student engagement. With regard to student-faculty interaction, for example, colleges can require students to see faculty members in their offices at least once before mid-semester or develop strategies for faculty to build career planning into the classroom experience.

*"CCSSE data allow us to assess the institutional effectiveness of our existing programs and to make more research-based policy and budgetary decisions related to student resources and support services."*

— Vernese Edghill-Walden, Associate Director, Research and Evaluation, Richard J. Daley College (IL)

Faculty members who are thinking intentionally about course design also can make other types of engagement inescapable. They can require students to work on projects with other students outside of class, require a service learning project, make the end-of-course assessment a group project, and so on.

class, bringing support services directly into the learning experience. Other learning communities work across disciplines, such as a history class that is linked to a writing class.

At **Santa Ana College (CA)**, some faculty members teach for one semester in a learning community. Faculty members comment on the powerful interaction that occurs in these classroom environments and bring this learning culture back to their traditional classrooms. Some faculty refer to their learning community experiences as exceptionally valuable professional development.

**Skagit Valley College (WA)** requires every student enrolling in a degree or transfer program to participate in a learning community. This new requirement is based on the college's CCSSE data, which consistently indicate that students who have been part of a learning community are more engaged and more frequently use higher-order thinking skills than their peers who did not participate in a learning community.

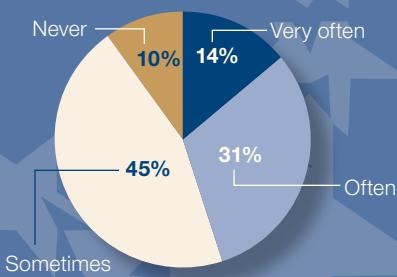
**Dona Ana Community College (NM)** takes another approach to inescapable engagement. The college has introduced what it calls intrusive interventions. Through an early alert system, each student enrolled in a credit course receives a progress report by the seventh week of the term. The report indicates a course grade, areas needing improvement in order to succeed in the class, and available resources to help the student improve. Another element of intrusive intervention: Advisors and faculty telephone students who miss two or more classes.

### CCSSE BENCHMARK

#### Student-Faculty Interaction Happens Primarily in the Classroom

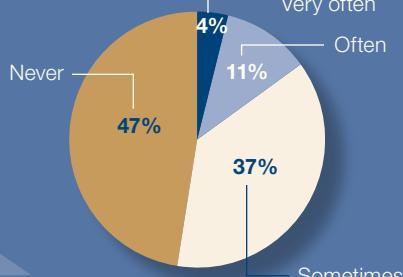
In your experience at this college during the current school year, about how often have you done each of the following?

##### Discussed grades or assignments with an instructor



Source: 2007 CCSSE Cohort data.

##### Discussed ideas from readings or classes with instructors outside the classroom



Note: Percentages may not total 100% due to rounding.

# Reaching for Excellence

High-performing colleges come in all shapes and sizes — large and small; urban, suburban, and rural; and so on. Like all community colleges, these colleges typically have two things in common. They are short on funds, and they serve the same kinds of students: those who are juggling significant time commitments; likely to attend college part-time; and likely to have academic, personal, and financial challenges.

Emerging research shows that high-performing colleges, while very diverse, tend to share particular attributes that likely contribute to their success. These attributes are the result of choices the college makes over time — decisions that, taken together, shape institutional culture, priorities, and practices.\*

Colleges demonstrating a serious commitment to improving student learning and success share the following attributes:

- ★ **A student-centered vision.** Educational institutions at all levels tend to say they have a student-centered vision. High-performing colleges elevate their views of students, set high expectations and goals, communicate them consistently and clearly, and give students the tools to achieve them. They *believe* that students can succeed, and this belief is reflected in all that they say and do. They focus on creating relationships and connections that support students and encourage them over time. A student-centered vision that operates at this level turns rhetoric into action.
- ★ **Leadership.** Creating and sustaining high performance requires a commitment from individuals at all levels of a college. A single individual cannot do

## CCSSE Opposes Ranking

CCSSE opposes using its data to rank colleges for a number of reasons.

- ★ There is no single number that can adequately — or accurately — describe a college's performance; most colleges will perform relatively well on some benchmarks and need improvement on others.
- ★ Each community college's performance should be considered in terms of its mission, institutional focus, and student characteristics.
- ★ Because of differences in these areas — and variations in college resources — comparing survey results between individual institutions serves little constructive purpose and likely will be misleading.
- ★ CCSSE member colleges are a self-selected group. Their choice to participate in the survey demonstrates their interest in assessing and improving their educational practices, and it distinguishes them. Ranking within this group of colleges — those willing to step up to serious self-assessment and public reporting — might discourage participation and certainly would paint an incomplete picture.
- ★ Ranking does not serve a purpose related to improving student outcomes. Improvement over time — where a particular college is now, compared with where it wants to be — likely is the best gauge of a college's efforts to enhance student learning and persistence.

this work alone. A single person, however, can bring people together and inspire them to act. An effective leader ensures that there are clear priorities, sets the tone, and insists on a relentless focus on explicit goals for improving student success.

★ **Focus and sustained effort over time.** Change does not happen overnight, and it is astonishingly easy for colleges to be distracted from their goals. At some colleges, the day-to-day work gets in the way of strategic planning and data review. At others, naysayers dampen enthusiasm and disrupt progress. Successful colleges, however, manage to define and sustain focus on central priorities that (almost) everyone can understand and support.

★ **Congruence of values and purpose across the college.** At high-performing colleges, student success is an institution-wide effort that is shared by everyone and consistently

reflected in language, policy, and practice, from student expectations to hiring and professional development.

★ **Use of data, both quantitative and qualitative,** to evaluate current practice, target improvements, set priorities, and monitor progress over time. Doing this work effectively requires a commitment to institutional research capacity and a research officer who is part of the college leadership team. Most of all, it requires that colleges have the courage to tell themselves the truth about student success and institutional performance, always seeking the most powerful ways to improve.

\*Kuh, G.D., et al., *Student Success in College: Creating Conditions That Matter* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass), March 2005; Jenkins, D., *Community College Management Practices that Promote Student Success* (CCRC Brief No. 31) (New York: Community College Research Center, Teachers College, Columbia University), October 2006; CCSSE, MetLife Foundation Initiative on Student Success, *Building Relationships for Student Success*.

# Special Focus: Entering Student Engagement

Each year, the CCSSE survey includes five *special focus* survey items that examine an area of student experience and institutional performance that is critical for student success. The special focus items concentrate on a different topic each year.

The 2007 special focus items highlight entering student engagement, an area of growing interest to CCSSE and to many community colleges.

The CCSSE survey is administered in the spring term, by which time most (though not all) students will have had some substantial experience with their institutions — experience that is important for responding to the CCSSE survey. But longitudinal data show that community colleges lose many students before a second term of enrollment. Thus, by the spring term, the students who still are in college, particularly those from higher-risk groups, might already be considered college “survivors.”

Thus, CCSSE is introducing a sharper focus on the front door of the college. CCSSE aims to provide colleges with systematic information about students’ earliest college experiences, so the colleges can help more students succeed in the first term and persist to the second and subsequent terms.

To begin this examination, CCSSE used the 2007 special focus survey items to elicit information from students about their experiences in the first four weeks

of college. The special focus survey items address advising, instructional techniques, orientation, and other practices associated with improved student success.

The next step was the fall 2007 pilot administration of the new Survey of Entering Student Engagement (*SENSE*). Accompanying *SENSE* is the MetLife Foundation *Starting Right* initiative, which includes a qualitative study of the entering student experience. Details about *SENSE*, its 2007 pilot, and *Starting Right* will be described in the first-look report for *SENSE — Starting Right: A First Look at Engaging Entering Students* — to be published in spring 2008.

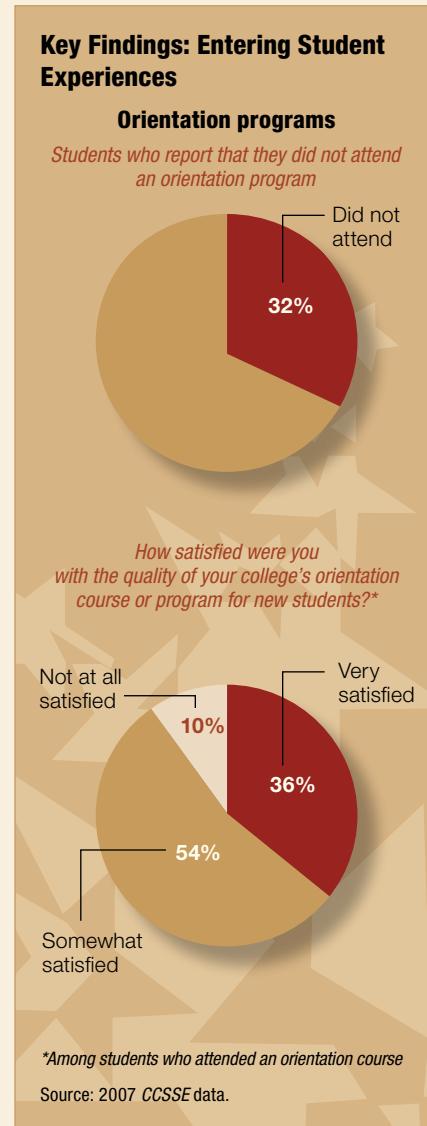
Taken together, CCSSE and *SENSE* will offer complementary pieces of the student success puzzle, with CCSSE providing a comprehensive look at the overall quality of all students’ educational experiences and *SENSE* offering a focused snapshot of new students and their earliest college experiences.

## Entering Students: Get Them While You Can

The special focus survey items show that fewer than half of students (43%) met with an advisor to discuss educational goals in the first four weeks of college, and more than a third of students (36%) did not complete an assessment test for course placement by the end of their first four weeks of college.

Nearly one-third of entering students (32%) did not attend an orientation course. Among students who attended an orientation course, slightly more than a third (36%) say they were *very satisfied* with their experience.

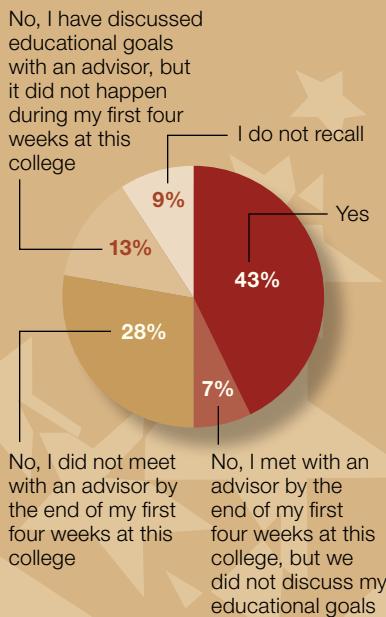
In classrooms, 62% of respondents report that instructors used techniques that encouraged them to be actively involved *often* or *very often* during their first four weeks of college. Overall, 35% of students report that they are *very satisfied* with their colleges’ processes for working with new students.



## Key Findings: Entering Student Experiences

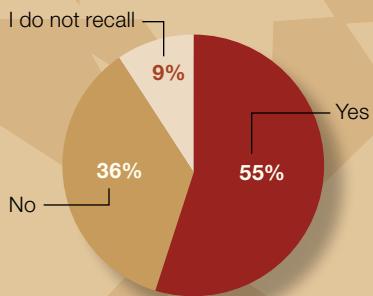
### Advising

*By the end of my FIRST FOUR WEEKS at this college, I had met with an advisor to discuss my educational goals.*



### Assessment tests

*By the end of my FIRST FOUR WEEKS I had completed an initial assessment test to determine which reading, writing, and math courses I should enroll in.*



Source: 2007 CCSSE data.

### Strategies in Action

The **Kingsborough Community College (NY)** Freshman Year Experience (FYE) begins at the time of admission, when students meet with advisors and receive information about their placement examination results, file their financial aid information, are advised about classes, and complete online registration for their first semester. FYE also includes a new student orientation and celebratory activities. In addition, most entering students participate in learning communities. These programs include an English course, another content area course, and a student development course. The instructor for the student development course serves as the case manager for students in that learning community.

Kingsborough found greater freshman-year retention among students who participated in learning communities. In 2006–07, the fall-to-spring retention rate for students in learning communities was 89%, compared to 78% for non-participating freshmen.

As a result, expansion of learning communities became a top priority for Kingsborough. By 2010, the college plans to extend learning communities to 40 cohorts each semester, enough to serve 80% of incoming freshmen.

The **Brookhaven College (TX)** professional development workshop, *Preparing for the Critical First Three Weeks of Class*, helps faculty members identify teaching

strategies that engage students in the first days of class. For example, instructors might assign small work or study groups that encourage student relationships. Other strategies revolve around small writing projects, such as asking students to write a job description for where they work. This type of assignment gives an indication of students' writing and organizational skills as well as the outside demands on their time. Always, faculty members are encouraged to give prompt feedback on the assignments.

The workshop also addresses practical issues, such as reducing stress levels and becoming acquainted with students and their needs.

### Durham Technical Community

**College (NC)** increased its focus on entering students after concluding that its overall persistence rates were "discouraging" and its disaggregated persistence rates "alarming" for some of the college's student populations. The college redesigned orientation and began offering pre-enrollment orientation sessions; began requiring a credit-bearing college success course in the first semester for all associate in applied science students; instituted an early-alert system with counseling and tutoring for at-risk students; began assigning each student a specific faculty advisor upon admission and requiring students to meet with their advisors prior to enrollment; and started to pair peer mentors with college success course students.

*"CCSSE gives us concrete evidence directly from our students about how they perceive our actions, policies, and programs with regard to accomplishing key outcomes."*

— Cindy Freidmutter, Vice President of External and Community Affairs, LaGuardia Community College (NY)

# Overview of the 2007 CCSSE Cohort

Each year, the CCSSE survey is administered in the spring during class sessions at CCSSE member colleges. All CCSSE data analyses use a three-year cohort of participating colleges. This year's three-year cohort — called the 2007 CCSSE Cohort — includes data from all colleges that participated in CCSSE from 2005 through 2007.

An overview of the 2007 cohort's participating colleges and their students follows. Details are available at [www.ccsse.org](http://www.ccsse.org).

- ★ More than 310,000 students from 525 institutions in 48 states, British Columbia, and the Marshall Islands are included in the 2007 CCSSE Cohort.
- ★ 2007 CCSSE Cohort member colleges enroll a total of 3,404,271 credit students, or about 53% of the total credit-student population in the nation's community colleges.
- ★ Of the 525 participating colleges, nearly 50% are classified as small (up to 4,499 students), 26% as medium (4,500–7,999 students), 16% as large (8,000–14,999 students), and 9% as extra large (15,000 or more students). Nationally, 53% of community colleges are small, 22% are medium, 14% are large, and 9% are extra large.
- ★ According to the new Carnegie classifications,\* the 2007 CCSSE Cohort includes 102 (19%) urban-serving

colleges, 113 (22%) suburban-serving colleges, and 310 (59%) rural-serving colleges. Fall 2005 IPEDS data indicate that among all U.S. community colleges, 18% are urban, 21% are suburban, and 61% are rural.

- ★ 2007 CCSSE Cohort respondents are 60% female and 40% male. These figures are similar to the national community college student ratio, which is 59% female and 41% male.
- ★ 2007 CCSSE Cohort respondents range in age from 18 to 65 and older.
- ★ With respect to race/ethnicity, 2007 CCSSE Cohort respondents and the national community college population may be compared as follows:

Race/ethnicity	CCSSE respondents	National percentages
White	64%	58%
Latino/Hispanic	10%	15%
Black	11%	13%
International*	6%	1%
Asian	4%	6%
Native American	2%	1%
Other	4%	5%

\*International students are not citizens or nationals of the United States and are in the country on a visa or temporary basis.

*Note: Percentages may not total 100% due to rounding.*

Sources: 2007 CCSSE Cohort data; IPEDS, fall 2005.

- ★ 2007 CCSSE Cohort respondents generally reflect the underlying student population of the participating colleges in terms of gender and race/ethnicity. Part-time students, however, were underrepresented in the CCSSE sample because classes are sampled rather than individual

students. (About 31% of CCSSE respondents are enrolled part-time, and 69% are enrolled full-time. IPEDS shows that the national figures are 63% part-time and 37% full-time.) To address this discrepancy, CCSSE results are weighted by part-time and full-time status to reflect the institutions' actual proportions of part-time and full-time students.

## Noteworthy Facts

- ★ The 2007 CCSSE membership (colleges that administered the survey in 2007) includes statewide participation in Alaska, Florida, Louisiana, Massachusetts, North Dakota, and Wyoming. Other state-based consortia include groups of colleges in Illinois, Kentucky, Minnesota, South Carolina, Tennessee, and Texas.
- ★ This was the first year of participation for the CCSSE-SSPIRE Consortium. The Student Support Partnership Integrating Resources and Education (SSPIRE) Initiative, launched in 2006 and supported by the James Irvine Foundation, includes nine California community colleges. SSPIRE colleges aspire to raise academic achievement, rates of persistence, and degree completion among primarily young, low-income, underprepared, and traditionally underserved students.
- ★ 2007 was the third year of participation for the Achieving the Dream Consortium, the fourth year of participation for the Hispanic Student Success Consortium, and the fourth year of participation for the Texas Small Colleges Consortium.

\*Beginning this year, CCSSE is using the Carnegie Classifications (from the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching) to identify colleges as urban, suburban, and rural.

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# CCSSE Member Colleges

For a list of CCSSE member colleges, visit [www.ccsse.org](http://www.ccsse.org).



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